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Oral History/ Alexis Hartline: Patricia Shadden- Growing Up on the Home Front during WWII

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Student Interviewer's Name: Alexis Hartline

Interviewee's Name: Patricia Shadden

Time and Location of Interview:

The interview was conducted in one session on November 2, 2015 and lasted approximately 45 minutes. It was conducted in the Interviewee's room at Morning Pointe Assisted Living Center in Collegedale, TN. Only the interviewer and the interviewee were present.

About Patricia Shadden:

Patricia Shadden was born February 22, 1937 in Chattanooga, TN. She has lived in the Ooltewah/Chattanooga area all of her life, and was the daughter of an American soldier who fought in Germany during World War II. The interviewee did not delve into her personal life after the war, and wished to share mainly about her childhood experience with World War II. This interview covers topics such as Patricia's own personal experience of living on the home front during the war, giving a glimpse into this time from a child's perspective. Rationing, buying war bonds, collecting bacon grease, and the overall reaction to the war by the people in Chattanooga are some of the topics Patricia covers, as well as stories of her father's experience serving as a soldier in Germany. The interview was conducted Nov. 2, 2015 in her room at Morning Pointe, Collegedale, TN.

Interviewer: Alexis Hartline (AH)

Interviewee: Patricia Shadden (PS)

AH: Alright, let's go ahead and get started. I just want to say thank you again for agreeing to share your experience, it is highly appreciated.

PS: Well you're quite welcome, as I told you, this is my favorite time period.

AH: Just to start out, can you state your full name Mrs. Shadden?

PS: Patricia Doyle Shadden.

AH: And can I also have your date of birth and where you were born?

PS: I was born on February 22, 1937, right here in Chattanooga. I've lived here all my life.

AH: Ah, okay. So you've been able to see this city develop over the years I'm sure.

PS: Oh yes, most definitely (chuckles lightly)

AH: So Mrs. Shadden, can you tell me a little bit about your involvement with World War II? You said you were born in 1937. (Pauses) You must have been quite young when the war broke out.

PS: Well I had not started school, so I was small. My parents, um, my father worked at a hardware store, and my mother stayed at home. And I had a baby brother. We lived in St. Elmo, which was a wonderful community to grow up in..and we had..we had a backyard, that was my place to play. There was a big apple tree in the yard, and my daddy put a swing in the apple tree for me, and I would sit in the swing and sing, and tell myself stories. My mother used to say in the spring when the apple tree had blossoms on it, they would fall down and just rain down on me. My mother said she always wished she could paint because that was just such a pretty picture of me in the swing.

AH: So it sounds like you had a really nice, comforting childhood?

PS: Yes, I did. Very good times for sure. Though it was hard when the war broke out because my daddy had to go away. Life changed the day the war started.

AH: Do you remember hearing about the war breaking out Mrs. Shadden? I know that the radio was a huge source of information back then. Did you hear any sort of broadcast, maybe about Pearl Harbor, or any other significant event?

PS: Yes I do. I remember Pearl Harbor.

AH: What were your thoughts when that happened? Or rather, what was going on when you heard the news? You were young of course, but in what ways did the start of the war affect you?

PS: Well, of course I didn't understand how it was going to affect everybody, but I knew it was a bad thing. Uh, we had been to my grandparents house... spent the day there. We were on our way back home on a city bus and someone got on the bus. We had no idea it had happened...Someone got on the bus and was telling the driver about it, and of course everybody... (pauses) There was not a sound. Everybody was listening to him. And everybody was just in shock because we couldn't believe that such a thing had happened. But as I said, I didn't know it was a big scary thing, I just knew something was not right.

AH: That's understandable. Do you remember the reactions of the adults around you? Your father...he must have been in the age range to be drafted?

PS: Well, of course he knew that he was in the age range, that he would probably be drafted. And of course he was not wanting to leave his family, but um...he said it was a job that had to be done and he willingly went. Although he said as they were loading on the ship to go overseas, he told everybody he saw that he wasn't supposed to be there. He was thirty-two I believe, and kind of in the older bracket of men that were drafted.And of

course he had two children, and he said “I wasn’t supposed to be there! But nobody listened to me and I went anyway.” (laughs) Anyway, it wasn’t something that he wanted to do, like most men, but it was something that the men in that time period knew it had to be done.

AH: How did your family life change after your father was drafted? In his absence, what major changes happened and how did it transform your life?

PS: Well of course my mother was left to be the only parent and we spent a lot of time... (trails off) Her parents lived in Dade County on a farm and we spent quite a lot of time there because she would get so lonely. My mother didn’t really have a lot of women friends in the neighborhood, and except for family we were just kind of isolated. But she did try to keep things as normal as possible. We still went to church, we went to the movies, we went downtown to shop...we still did all the things we had normally done. We just didn’t have daddy. Of course, once I went to school my mind sort of wasn’t so focused on him being gone.

AH: So you were a student during the war? Can you tell me perhaps a little bit about your experience in school during this time?

PS: Well, of course I don't know what it would've been like had it not been wartime, but a lot of children were in the same position I was. Their fathers were in the service, and we tried to do a lot of things to...(pauses to collect thoughts) We really had a patriotic spirit. We had one day a week where we had stamp day. We would collect seven stamps in a little book, and when you filled the book, you could trade it in for a bond. So everybody, you know, in that particular date, you know you had your money...(pauses) So that's what we did. We tied our money in a handkerchief with our coins for our stamps. There was a daycare in the basement of the school that was started because of the war. A lot of mothers went to work. But you know back then there weren't daycares on every corner like there are now. So they opened one in the school, and we had little children, babies and toddlers in the building also, because their mothers were working.

AH: That's interesting...so would you say around that time is when the daycare system started to really grow?

PS: Oh for sure. We had never really had anything like that before, you know? Mothers were usually always at home taking care of the children. It was only when they had to start working because of the war that those childcare places started to happen. A lot of the mothers worked at what is... (pauses) I can't think of the name of it now. It was Chattanooga Medicine Company at that time...They packed rations for troops, and a lot of mothers went to work there. They hired a lot of extra women. And the American Lava Plant, which is no longer in Chattanooga, it's something else now, but they made insulators. And I don't know what they had to do with the war effort, but it was an important thing

because a lot of women worked there. And the women who worked there wore slacks. Women didn't wear pants in those days. And when you were downtown, you could always tell the girls who worked at American Lava because you'd see them on the sidewalk and they would have on pants...the only women in town wearing pants.

AH: Was your mother involved in any of these things? Did she have to go to work at all during this time?

PS: No, she stayed at home with us.

AH: That's really fortunate that she was able to stay and take care of you and your brother. (pauses) Did your family ever experience rationing?

PS: Oh yes, we did! (laughs) A lot of things were rationed. The one that I remember most I guess is chocolate. There was no chocolate. They all went to the men's rations for the war. Daddy would tell us about how he always saved his candy and chewing gum he received to give to the children he would meet over in Germany. But you know at home, there was a little store across from the school, and they sold the candies and candy bars...and I don't know what. It was just kind of a little general store, not a grocery store. But every once in a while they would get Hershey Bars (laughs) And I don't know how they got 'em, I don't know anything about that, but uh, they would get 'em. And the word would go through the school that they had Hershey's at the store, and we would line up after school outside the store. And they would only let a few in at a time cause there would be a crush of kids, you know, and you could only buy two. That's all they would sell you. No matter how much money you had you could only buy two of 'em. But you know, it was a great day when the store had the Hershey Bars, because we didn't get them very often.

AH: (laughs) I'm sure... (pauses) So you collected stamp booklets for War Bonds in school... Was there anything else you did as a child to support the war effort?

PS: Well, we collected tin cans. We would save them all, and cut out the ends so you could flatten the tin cans. That was probably the most fun part was flattening the cans. The little girl who lived across the street from me had a wagon, and she decided one day that we should go out in the neighborhood and collect tin cans. Well we didn't ask permission, we just went, and our mothers didn't know where we were. They were frantic by the time they had found out what we had done. (laughs) It was okay, except they just didn't know what we were doing. I don't remember where we took the cans. There had to be a collection point, I just don't remember where it was. But you did save them. Every household saved their tin cans. Even the tin foil on the chewing gum wrappers, you would peel that off...'Course you started out with a little ball of tin about as big as the end of your thumb, but it got bigger and bigger. And we would have those that we turned in also. I remembered that mother always had a container of bacon drippings. And I always wondered why she saved those. So, my son is really into WWII, and I asked him one day and he researched it.

He said they used it in making explosives? I don't know how it was used, but anyway, there was a collection point for that also. You didn't throw anything away back then. Everything was used and reused, down to where there was nothing left of it! (laughs)

AH: (laughs) So with all these rations and collection drives going on, how did your family support themselves? Especially with your mother being the only parent?

PS: We had bought groceries from a grocery store down on South Broad Street and they were friends of my dad's. They promised him that they would take care of us during the war. Well, you know, I had a baby brother, so sometimes we needed special groceries and things like that. Mother would make a list and she would call them on the phone, and they would deliver the groceries to us. But they would say, uh, if she ordered a particular thing, they would say, "We don't have any of that, but we've got this instead.", and they would give her something else that would take its place I guess. So they were really good to help us be sure we had food. And of course my grandparents had a farm, so um, we had milk and butter, and vegetables from the farm, so we were better off than a lot of people were. We never went hungry. Another thing, we had a coal stove, and it was sometimes hard to get coal. You had to be sure that you ordered before you ran completely out, because they could tell you it might be a lot time before they would have any more coal.

AH: Did you ever experience running out?

PS: No, we didn't.

AH: As part of the war effort, I know many families were encouraged to grow Victory Gardens. Did your family have a Victory Garden? Or did anyone you know of have a Victory Garden?

PS: We did have a garden. My brother, after he got a little bigger, he loved mashed potatoes, and he would eat them until he just popped. And so one year he wanted to know if we could plant mashed potatoes in our garden! (laughs) But we always had green beans and tomatoes, and a lot of vegetables. We had a good-sized garden. And during the holidays we were always able to contribute to the family meals like Christmas...you know, things like that. We were lucky, because most families didn't have a lot of food to where they could do that.

AH: You mentioned holidays...Do you have any special memories about holidays during the war? With the absence of your father, did holidays change for your family? Was anything different?

PS: I don't remember that it was so much different. We were part of a very large extended family. Daddy was one of eight children, and so there were a lot of cousins. For Christmas we would go to my grandparents, and we always had whatever gifts we thought we had to have for Christmas, you know. We always got them. And my mother sewed, so she made a

lot of things. She was very talented with needle and thread. She made all my clothes, and that went on for many years. You know back then you didn't have a dozen pairs of shoes. I was telling somebody the other day, I had two pairs of shoes back then- I had Sunday shoes, and I had school shoes. And we had our shoes resoled. You would go to the shoe shop and they would repair your shoes, cause back then you didn't just throw them away when they began to wear out. And with my father serving over in Germany, we didn't have a lot of income to where we could really afford to buy more clothes, you know? Once he came back things got easier financially, but we did what we could to support Daddy and the boys overseas. We saved and saved, and did our best to contribute.

AH: You said your father had served in Germany...did he ever mention his time over there?

PS: I remember D-Day, because all the church bells rang, and the churches were all open and people would go to church, and of course there was no TV. And we listened to the radio, of course, the radio probably helped us keep our sanity during that time, because we got the news from the war, and we had the music...it was so important. The music from that era I think helped the American people to stay positive.

AH: The radio has been talked about as one of the things that really united Americans and kept them informed during this time. What was the radio like? Do you remember any kind of specific things they spoke about on the broadcasts?

PS: Well, you know it's funny... I had written something about listening to the radio and I said, you know, the radio was in the living room, just like the TV is now. And you sat around the radio to listen to it, just as if you were watching it...There was something about sitting around it and hearing it, you know...And there were certain newsmen who were important. You always wanted to hear what they had to say because you trusted them. We kept up, or thought we did, with where Daddy was. Every night we watched the news, and we went to the movies of course because the newsreels showed what was going on there in the theater. So that was important too.

AH: Did you ever hear about the bombings in London over the radio? I know back then they would sometimes broadcast about what was happening in England.

PS: No, I mean, we knew that was going on, but I don't really remember hearing about it on the radio. I had, when I was in third grade, my third grade teacher had a list of children in England, and she asked us if we'd like to have a pin pal, and those of us who wanted to signed up. And I did correspond with a girl, um...for that school year, and maybe a little bit longer. She did write to me about the raids in London, which of course were terrible things...

AH: Yes, they certainly were terrible. So you wrote this girl... Do you remember any of the details she shared with you in her letters? It must've been interesting to hear about the war from her perspective.

PS: I really don't remember, but I have a friend who is British, and I had talked to her about some things about the war. During that time though, she was an infant. But she said that they lived on a farm outside London, and she said her mother (trails off). They had a farmhouse that was two stories, and underneath the stairs there was a closet and she said that's where her mother would hide her family when they had bombings. And they had a lot of children who were evacuated from London out to the country, and her family kept a lot of children in their home during that time.

AH: Wow...that's incredible...

PS: Yes, it truly was. You know back then the people did what needed to be done, even until the end of the war.

AH: What do you remember when the war ended? Were there celebrations? Many of the major cities had pretty large celebrations out on the streets. I've seen the pictures from Times Square. You were living in Chattanooga at the time though. So what exactly was that like? How did the people here react to the news? Actually, to be more specific, how did you react?

PS: Well of course the first thing I thought was that my daddy would be home. You know, I thought he would be home tomorrow (laughs). I just remember that it was like a big party, and people went downtown Chattanooga. The streets were packed, you know, just *jammed* with people. And people were hugging and kissing each other. It was quite a celebration... You know, we just felt...(pauses) Even children knew that it was a great day.

AH: How old were you when the war ended?

PS: I was in the third grade, so I must've been about nine.

AH: When did your father finally get to come home?

PS: Well he was in the Army of Occupation, so he was in Europe for a good long while after the war was over. He said in one letter...(pauses) Of course you know there was a point system as to how they were discharged, and he said he would go back and count his points every so often (laughs). But he said he couldn't be too unhappy about being there because the alternative was that he would be sent to Japan to finish out the war, so it was better to be in Germany in the Occupation.

AH: How would you say life changed after the war? Would you say the war affected the rest of your life?

PS: Oh I think so. I think it made me appreciate our way of life, and it made me... (pauses) Oh well, I don't know exactly how to put that. You know, we did without a lot of things, and we learned that you didn't have to have everything that came along. you could certainly live without some luxuries. It was a luxury to be able to live, and when you looked at the lives of the children in Germany particularly, you felt fortunate that you were an American, and that you had what you had.

AH: Yes...it's interesting to hear this perspective. You know, my great-grandparents were in Germany during this time and were small children. So I've heard many stories myself about what it was like. It's neat to hear it from your perspective.

PS: Oh yes, I'm sure. You know, my daddy was always interested in the German children, and he would tell stories about...he told a story once to my children...You know, they used to ask him to tell his army tales (laughs), they would sit around the kitchen table at night, and he would be sitting there drinking coffee, and of course they would want a cup of coffee, so he would pour them a glass of milk and put a little coffee in it so they thought they had a cup of coffee and then they would all sit there and he would tell them stories. But he told them once...they were marching through a town in Germany, and the people had come out to watch them go through. And as they were marching along, this little girl came running out of the crowd and she walked up to my father and put her arms up for him to pick her up...and he did...(pauses trying to control emotions) And he said he guessed she missed her papa too. She patted him on the face and said "Papa...Papa". (Stops to control emotions) And so many of their men didn't come back...of course a lot of ours didn't either, but they were right there in that mess...it was...(pauses to wipe tears, trails off)

AH: Would you say the war changed your father?

PS: I think in some ways yes. He didn't stay at his job in the hardware store for very long after he came home. But you know, our lives pretty much went back to normal. It was hard for him to fit in. We moved to Ooltewah a short time later, and life just picked up and went on... You know, kids kept going to school, and a lot of the mothers who had taken jobs continued to work. I guess that was the beginning of women going into the work place. They found out that they could do a job and have a family too, and so that really changed things.

AH: How would you say things changed?

PS: It was nice to have things again, you know, people were able to buy cars, and big ticket items like appliances. Up until that point people had used their ice box and their ringer washers...My mother got an automatic washer after the war. So there were a lot of things that came about because you no longer had to put everything into war production.

AH: It seems that with both parents working due to women in the workforce there was much more money to go around as well. So you would definitely agree that there was a big economic boom after the war?

PS: Oh yes, definitely.

AH: If you could say something to our generation, those of us that haven't necessarily lived through such an event, what kind of attitude should those of us in younger generations have towards the prosperity of our country? Or even morally, what piece of advice would you give to the younger generations?

PS: Well, I think we all need to appreciate what we have and realize that those things are just things, and that the really important things are the people around us, our families, and our community. I think people were kinder to each other back then. You know we've probably gotten away from that now... But I think we look back and think, "You know, that was a good time". We use that term "a kinder, gentler time", but it really was... And people cared about each other. They took care of each other. If you had something that your neighbor needed, then you shared. And families moved in together back then because there were housing shortages. And people would take in their relatives...I wouldn't wanna do that now, you know, just open up your house to your family members necessarily (laughs). But back then, it worked so well and people helped each other. There aren't housing shortages now, and we are a well-off country. But I think we need to remember that kindness that Americans used to possess.

AH: I agree with you completely, and that's extremely valuable advice. Once again Ms. Shadden I just appreciate so much that you agreed to share your story with me. Your personal perspective of the war is one that is often overlooked, you know, the child's perspective, and so I'm just so happy to have been able to hear everything you had to say.

PS: Oh, you're quite welcome. I'm very happy to have shared it with you.

(End Interview)

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I spent approximately two hours researching and reading in preparation for my second interview.

Original Interview Questions

1. What is your full name?
2. When and where were you born?
3. Where did you live during the war?
4. What was your involvement in the war?
5. How old were you when the war started?
6. How did the war affect your family?
7. What was it like being a child during a time of war?
8. What were some of the war efforts that were done on the Home Front?
9. Did you experience rationing?
10. Did your family have a Victory Garden?
11. Do you have any siblings?
12. What was your mother like?
13. What was her reaction to the war?
14. What was your father like?
15. What was his reaction to the war?
16. Did any of your family serve in the military? If so, how did this change your family life?
17. Where did they serve?
18. What was their experience?
19. What did holidays become like during the war?
20. Do you remember when the war started?
21. What did your family do to stretch food and clothing, etc.?
22. Do you remember hearing about Pearl Harbor, D-Day, and other major battles?
23. How did the war change your school experience?
24. Do you remember anything about the war industries?
25. Did your mother work in any of the industries?
26. Do you remember when the war ended?
27. How did the war affect the rest of your life?
28. How did the war change your family life after your family members returned home from service?
29. Do you have any lesson(s) you would want to share with our generation from your experience?